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JOB SATISFACTION: A RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP

A Report

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JOB SATISFACTION: A RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP

Abstract

Teacher job satisfaction results from a number of factors. This report explores the relationship between teacher involvement in the decision-making process, principal leadership and teacher job satisfaction. A research study conducted by the Eastern Washington University Department of Education indicates that principals who foster participatory management systems will markedly increase the job satisfaction levels of teachers and still retain a position of leadership within the school structure.

JOB SATISFACTION: A RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP

I. Introduction

The issue of teacher job satisfaction is gaining importance for school administrators as the 1990's -- a decade of projected teacher shortages -- draw near. The recruitment and retention of highly qualified educators can no longer be treated as an academic question, but must be resolved in the practical realm of America's free market system. Without a doubt, economic factors s uch as salaries, benefits and educational funding play significant roles when an individual is deciding whether or not to teach. Public recognition (or lack of it) has also been identified as an important factor affecting educational career decisions.

Another factor related to job satisfaction, and thus the decision to join or remain among the teaching ranks, concerns opportunities for participatory management within the school setting. Ben Brodinsky, among many others, believes that participatory management practices, here defined as a meaningful involvement in a school's decision-making process, build teacher morale. Writing for Instructor and Teacher, Brodinsky said, "The more opportunity and power you give employees, the more effective they will become and the more satisfaction they will get from their jobs."

John Goodlad, in A Place Called School, while remarking upon the lack of studies drawing a clear connection between

teacher satisfaction and student achievement, adds: "More common are studies showing that supportive conditions such as sensitive leadership by the principal, availability of help, and involvement in schoolwide decisions, tend to be associated with greater enthusiasm, professionalism and career fulfillment on the part of teachers." (Italics added)

In the next paragraph Goodlad states, ". . . it should not be necessary to establish these relationships scientifically in order to accept the proposition that teachers, like other humans, are entitled to a satisfying workplace."

As an administrative and instructional leader, the school principal must be regarded as the person who shapes the decision-making process in his or her school. For that reason, the Eastern Washington University Department of Education surveyed possible interactions between the factors of 1) participatory management opportunities; 2) principal leadership; and 3) overall teacher job satisfaction.

Our survey results clearly indicate that principals who encourage teacher participation in their school's decision-making process also exert a strong influence on positive teacher attitudes and job satisfaction.

II. Survey Methods and General Results

The survey conducted by the EWU Department of Education utilized questionnaires and methods developed by Dr. James Lipham and others from the University of Wisconsin. The survey contains four sections. These respectively analyze teacher attitudes

towards involvement in decisions, assess teacher attitudes toward their individual principal's leadership qualities, survey job satisfaction levels and collect personal data. Participants normally complete the total instrument within thirty minutes.

Nine secondary schools from three rural Washington State counties participated in the survey. The smallest school consists of five teachers and one administrator; the largest employs nineteen teachers and one administrator. The principals in the nine participating schools are all males.

Eighty-five teachers, or 82 percent of the possible participants, responded to the survey. Of the respondents, approximately 42 percent are female and 58 percent are male. The average responding teacher has taught for 10.66 years, 7.9 years in his or her current school. The teachers' average age is 36. Among these teachers, 50 percent have completed a fifth year beyond the bachelor's degree and 23 percent have completed a master's degree.

The results of this survey were measured against the results obtained by Lipham in four urban/surburban Wisconsin school districts. In general, the Washington State teachers were slightly more satisfied with their jobs than the Wisconsin teachers. This slightly highe4r level of satisfaction may be related to smaller class sizes in the rural Washington State classrooms.

In general, responding teachers exhibited an overall sense of "deprivation" in terms of their decision-making powers. "Deprivation," as determined by the survey instrument, reflects

the differential between the teachers' perceived involvement and their desired involvement in a school's decision-making process. In no case did teachers indicate that they were too involved in the decision-making process.

However, the clearest demonstration of the relationship between participatory management, principal leadership and job satisfaction comes from an analysis of the responses for individual schools. To guarantee anonymity, the nine secondary schools which participated in this survey have been designated School "A," "B," "C", "D," "E," "F," "G," "H," and "I."

III. Authoritarian Governance As It Relates To Job Satisfaction

Teachers in three schools ("D," "E," and "G") exhibited marked degrees of "deprivation" in the decision-making process. Again, this discrepancy was determined by finding the differential between the teachers' perceived level of involvement and their desired level of involvement in the decision-making process. A "minus" differential of 1.0 or more was considered significant.

In School "D," teachers indicated deprivation in seven of the twenty surveyed areas. Among these areas were: developing reporting procedures, preparing budgets, developing inservice programs, developing teacher evaluation procedures, and so on. The teachers did report a higher level of involvement in instructional (technical) decisions than in managerial decisions.

The principal in this school received extremely high marks for leadership from his teachers, with no mark lower than 3.75 on a 4.0 scale. He received a perfect 4.0 on the three questions relating to his level of support, including being "friendly and easy to approach." The teachers in School "D" reported a good level of job satisfaction.

In School "G," the teachers reported deprivation in eight of the twenty decision-making areas. School "G's" principal received significantly low marks for leadership, falling below norms in eight of the ten surveyed attributes. Not surprisingly, the teachers at School "G" reported significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction with administrative personnel. Interestingly, their responses to general questions indicate a good level of job satisfaction in terms of the work environment, career opportunities, salary and pupil-teacher relations.

School "E" teachers reported decision-making deprivation in a whopping twelve of twenty areas. Eleven of the twelve areas can be classified as school management issues. School "E's" principal received significantly lower marks on four of the ten surveyed attributes, including being "friendly and easy to approach," "encouraging best efforts," instructional leadership, and "encouraging teamwork." Again, the teachers in School "E" reported high levels of dissatisfaction with school administration but good levels of satisfaction with other aspects of their jobs.

(Note: Teachers in School "H" reported the highest level of job dissatisfaction. Their low ratings, however, clustered in

the area of "school - community relations," indicating a specific problem indigenous to that school. All other factors for School "H" fell into normal ranges for the survey).

The results for Schools "D," "E" and "G" appear to be somewhat muddled. In one school, teachers acknowledge their lack of involvement in the decision-making process while reporting a high level of respect for their principal and a good level of job satisfaction. One surmises that, in this particular case, the principal's personal charm and management style have overridden objections related to autonomy and participatory management.

In the other two schools, teachers want to be more involved in decision-making and are dissatisfied to some degree with the management style of their principals. However, this specific dissatisfaction does not seem to adversely influence their general feelings of job satisfaction, which are good.

IV. Participatory Management And Principal Leadership As They Relate to Job Satisfaction.

Teachers in three schools ("A," "B" and "I") appeared to be exactly as involved in the decision-making process as they want to be. The differentials between perceived involvement and desired involvement were not significant for any of the twenty items surveyed. In short, each of these schools had arrived at a point between principal leadership and participatory management that might be characterized as "just right" or "just about right" for each group.

The principals at all three schools received very high leadership marks from their teachers, with no significant deviations from the norm in any of the ten surveyed attributes.

While job satisfaction levels at Schools "D," "E" and "G" can be characterized as "good," however, job satisfaction levels at Schools "A," "B" and "I" may be characterized as "excellent." Twenty-seven items were listed in the job satisfaction survey. Of those twenty-seven, teachers at School "A" reported higher than normal satisfaction in eight categories; teachers at School "B" reported higher than normal satisfaction in eighteen; and teachers at School "I" reported higher than normal satisfaction in thirteen. In addition, teachers in Schools "A," "B" and "I" did not exhibit significant levels of dissatisfaction <u>in any category surveyed</u>.

The data from Schools "A," "B" and "I" suggests, first, that participatory management significantly <u>increases</u> job satisfaction levels among teachers. Second, principals who facilitate participatory management systems are not perceived by their teachers as "weak" or "wishy-washy." Instead, they are viewed as strong leaders.

To understand this finding better, it is necessary to return to the survey assumptions. Two survey tests establish the differential between teachers' perceived involvement in school decisions and their desired involvement. However, the tests do not establish an acceptable "bench mark" or involvement level to which all schools must adhere. Thus the amount of desired involvement would differ from school to school, dependent upon a

variety of personal and organizational characteristics.

In schools "A," "B" and "I" the teachers and principals have negotiated an involvement level that clearly satisfies everyone in those particular schools. (The term "negotiate" does not in this context refer to its traditional labor-management meaning; the survey does not touch on management methods). The principal fulfills the role of the principal, as perceived by the teachers, while interacting with a fostering real involvement by the teachers to the degree they desire it.

The ability to strike a balance between principal leadership and teacher involvement appears, therefore, to require an individual who is able to act with sensitivity toward the people he or she is responsible for leading. It is not inconsistent that the principals in schools "A," "B" and "I" all received high marks for being "supportive," "friendly," or "easy to approach." Today's teachers are asking for principal leadership and more involvement in the decision-making process. These are not contradictory desires for principals who are willing to exercise their leadership by working with teachers to define areas of authority, roles and common goals.

IV. Conclusions

As teacher shortages grow more severe in the years ahead, educational administrators must begin to analyze all the factors contributing to the career decisions of potential and current teachers. Today's teachers are asking to be empowered with

decision-making ability for those instructional and school management issues which directly affect their careers and working environments.

Our survey shows that a participatory management style positively impacts teacher job satisfaction without undermining the leadership role of the principal.

Much of the corporate world has adopted the concept of "quality circles," or similar participatory management groups. Principals concerned with recruiting and retaining high quality teachers in the years ahead will familiarize and adopt those methods that facilitate participatory management systems. Ironically, according to our survey, those principals who "loosen the reins of power" will simultaneously enhance their leadership position and job satisfaction levels among the teachers within their schools.

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